

**Remarks at Grover Cleveland  
Middle School in Albuquerque, New  
Mexico**

*June 11, 1996*

Thank you so much. Thank you. Let me say, first of all, Tomas did a terrific job. Let's give him another hand. I thought he was wonderful. [Applause] Let me also say I am delighted to be back in New Mexico and delighted to be here to celebrate the commitment of your people across party lines, ethnic lines, and income lines to secure the future of the children of this State, and I thank you for that.

I thank our principal here, Mary Lou Anderson, for welcoming me at Grover Cleveland. I thank Superintendent Gonzalez for what he said about Las Cruces, and I'll say more about that in a minute. I thank Mayor Chavez for doing a wonderful job as your mayor, and for all the things that he talked about here. I thank Senator Bingaman and Congressman Schiff for being here with me. I thank Governor and Mrs. Johnson and the leaders of the legislature and former Governor and Mrs. King.

I want to thank the law enforcement officials who are here; I want to say a little more about them in a moment. And I see some leaders in the Native American community from New Mexico here. I thank them for coming. I'm glad to see all of you here as one people today.

You know, as I have said many times to the American people, I believe that the best days of this country are ahead of us. I believe we are moving into a period of possibility for people all across this country to live out their dreams, unlike anything we have ever known. But we have to find a way to meet the challenges of this new era and to preserve the basic values that made America great.

Now, there are some things that we can do in Washington, and a lot of things that you have to do out here. If you think about what you want your children's future to be like, what you want your grandchildren's future to be like, you have to think of these programs and these efforts that were discussed today. You have to think you want every child to have the same chances that young Mr. Sanchez talked about today.

Now, when I think about that, I think, well—and I've given this a great deal of thought; indeed, I think of little else as President. I want everybody to have a chance to have gainful work. I want all people to have a chance to get a good education. I want the American people to be able to raise their children on safe streets in safe neighborhoods. And those things we can make a contribution to.

When we invest, for example, in your laboratories here in New Mexico as they move from the cold war to the new global economy to try to preserve new technologies, to create new high-wage jobs, that's a way of creating a new economy. When we cut the deficit by more than 50 percent and get interest rates down and expand exports so that our economy produces 9.7 million new jobs in 3½ years, those things help to create a structure of opportunity for children in the future. And that's very, very important.

If you look at education, we have tried to expand educational opportunities, everything from providing more funds for more kids to be in Head Start programs to helping States to set higher standards for their schools, to a commitment to connect every single classroom and library in every school in America to the Internet by the year 2000, which will help all the children here, to giving every family in this country on a modest income a deduction for the cost of college education and a tax credit for the first 2 years of community college after high school. These things are important.

But safety is also important. Let me tell you what plagues me. In this country, in the last 3½ years, the crime rate is down, but violence among young people under 18 is up. That is a very troubling thing. You heard this fine student talk about the gang problem. Let me tell you, the young people who are coming into our schools today are coming in in record numbers. There will soon be classes in the elementary schools of America that are larger in numbers than any of the classes of the baby boom years.

And if we don't do something to turn this problem of gang violence and youth violence around, it can threaten to wreck all the progress we have made together in strengthening the economy and expanding edu-

cational opportunity and helping America to grow and go forward together. We cannot create opportunity in this country unless the American people are willing to take responsibility for giving our children safe childhoods and a safe future. And you are doing that in New Mexico. That's why I came here today.

You heard the mayor talk about some of the things the National Government can do: more police officers, the Brady bill, the other initiatives. They're important. But it's also important to try to help local communities seize control of their destiny. I don't know how many times I've heard my daughter's friends tell Hillary or me how they'll never forget the D.A.R.E. officer that came to them when they were in grade school to talk to them about the importance of staying away from drugs and living a drug-free life.

I don't know how many school teachers I've had come up to me and talk to me about the importance of the safe and drug-free schools program and the zero tolerance for guns and violence that we're trying to enforce all across America. If kids cannot be safe in school so they can learn and feel secure, where can they be safe? These things are all important.

But the most important thing perhaps we can do here is to do what I'm trying to do today, and that's to find ways to support you in taking local initiatives. And again, I say that this is something that ought to transcend politics. When I heard the mayor up here talking about the middle school cluster initiative, when I heard your principal, when I heard young Tomas talking about the program that he lauded and he thanked all the people who were involved in it, I realized that that is really the magic of what we have to do. Somehow all these kids that we're losing have to know that someone cares about them; have to know that there are not only things they have to say no to in life but things that they can say yes to; have to realize that they can have a future. Even if they come from difficult family backgrounds, even if they live on tough streets, even if they live in a tough neighborhood, they have to know that there's something they can say yes to.

The community curfew program you have instituted here, I know it's controversial

when you start it. I know a lot of young people think, well, why should I go in? But I can tell you, I have been in communities that have had these curfews for a couple of years. Crime goes down. Kids are safer on the street. They're better off at home 99 times out of 100. And after they've been there a couple of years they become popular with young people, as well as with the parents, because everybody wants a safer community to live in and a better and brighter future in which to live it.

And so I want to applaud you for doing that. And let me say that I heard some of you expressing your reservations when Superintendent Gonzalez talked about the school uniform program in Las Cruces. But let me tell you, no one says that you should do it. What we say is that you should have the right to do it.

But let me tell you a story about the biggest school district in the country to adopt a school uniform policy, Long Beach, California. It's the third biggest school district in California. Now, their problems are not the problems of every school district in America. But they had some terrible problems. They had kids that had to walk to school through neighborhoods that were infested by gangs. And they had to wonder every day whether the clothes they had on were going to get them rolled, either because the jackets or the shoes were too nice, or inadvertently they'd worn the wrong colors. They had to really worry about that. They had to worry about people coming on the school grounds during recess, during lunch time, and rolling the students and not even being identified as non-students until it was too late.

And so they permitted every school to make up their own mind about what kind of uniform they were going to have. They let the students design what they would wear and pick the colors. And it just had to be inexpensive enough for everybody to afford. And then they raised a little money for the people whose families were too poor to afford the uniforms. So that the uniforms, since they weren't the same for the whole district, they were different for every school. Sometimes the teachers wore them, too, and sometimes they didn't. It was all about the school's

identity. It was almost like being on one big team, being in one good gang.

And guess what? The crime rate went down; the violence went down; attendance went up; school learning went up. And even upper income students said, "This is a better deal," because they were no longer identified by what they wore, but by what kind of people they were, what kind of values they had and what kind of—[inaudible]—they had.

So I say to you, we don't say that you should do this. We say if you have a problem with young people and gangs, it's one thing you should consider. And you sure ought to be free to do it, free of any worries about lawsuits or hassles if you decide to do it.

There are all kinds of other things that schools are doing. A lot of schools are doing more work in character education. And we've tried to help schools deal with that. There are all kinds of initiatives that will work only if people at the local level believe it. So I say to you, I came here today to say I want America to look at New Mexico and say, "Well, maybe we should consider a curfew policy. Maybe we ought to consider a middle school initiative like the one they have in Albuquerque. Maybe we ought to consider a uniform policy like the one they have in Las Cruces."

I'm dry—I can't do this today—[laughter].

And some of the times, the best thing the Government can do in Washington is just to help you do this. The only thing we have done on all these issues is to make sure that the Justice Department and the Department of Education can give every school district in America guidance if they want to do these things. So there are no legal problems, no legal hassles, and people are free to put our children first and their future first.

So I say to all of you, again, I thank the people of New Mexico for being here today. I thank the political leaders for being here today. Two Members of your congressional delegation called me before I came because they couldn't come, Senator Domenici and my good friend Congressman Bill Richardson, and I thank them for calling expressing their support for these endeavors.

This is something we have to do together. And when you go home tonight, if you have any friends in other States or other commu-

nities in New Mexico, the next time they get in touch with you, I want you to talk to them about this, because we don't have any more important responsibility than to give every child in this country, no matter where they are, where they grow up, how tough their circumstances are, the opportunity to live out their dreams. We are going to be able to construct an economy that will permit them to live out their dreams. We know—we know that we can expand educational opportunity so that every single child who's willing to work for it will have access to go beyond high school to 2 years of community college and on to college if they want to do it—every child. We know we can do that.

But we will never, ever seize the promise of the 21st century in New Mexico or anywhere else in the United States until every child can live in a safe neighborhood and go to a safe school and belong to good, positive, constructive groups that reinforce the kind of values and the kind of imagination and the kind of character that our young speaker who introduced me evidenced today. That is a dream that you have to pursue and that every American family, every American community, and every American school has to pursue child by child by child. We'll do what we can to support you, but you need to do what you can to make sure every person you know is committed to that goal.

Thank you, and God bless you. And I hope you get rain tonight. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:08 p.m. at the athletic field. In his remarks, he referred to Tomas Sanchez, Grover Cleveland Middle School student who introduced the President; Jesse Gonzalez, superintendent, Las Cruces Public Schools; Mayor Martin Chavez of Albuquerque, NM; Gov. Gary E. Johnson of New Mexico and his wife, Dee; and former Gov. Bruce King of New Mexico and his wife, Alice.

### **Remarks at the Dedication of Mount Zion A.M.E. Church in Greeleyville, South Carolina**

*June 12, 1996*

Thank you very much, Bishop and Reverend Mackey. Let me begin by thanking you all for being here and making us all feel so